

WASHINGTON STATE LEGISLATURE

19th District News



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Committees and Leadership

- Capital Budget
- Economic Development, Agriculture & Trade
- Natural Resources, Ecology & Parks
- Rules
- Coastal Caucus



2005 Legislative Report

Dear neighbors,

The 2005 Legislature has adjourned after one of the most productive and successful sessions in a number of years.

In January, lawmakers faced some serious challenges. We had a \$1.6 billion shortfall in our state budget to deal with, but we also wanted to avoid a general tax increase. At the time, it seemed likely that almost every state agency would see some major cuts.

Yet, despite the budget mess, lawmakers knew we couldn't delay making critical investments in our schools, in health care for more of our population, in a stronger safety net for our seniors and children, and in our state's transportation infrastructure.

We managed to close the deficit, protect vital public programs from cuts, and make substantial economic investments in the long-term needs of our state – all without a general tax increase. And we accomplished a whole lot more, including passing landmark government accountability reforms and improvements in our elections system.

Inside this newsletter, you'll find all the details about the Legislature's efforts this year to make Washington a better place for you, your children and your grandchildren to live, work and raise a family.

We're interested in your thoughts and opinions about the budget or any other issues of concern to our district and our community. Please feel free to contact us or our staff anytime.

Thank you for the honor and privilege of representing you in the Legislature.

Sincerely yours,

Sen. Mark Doumit

Rep. Brian Blake

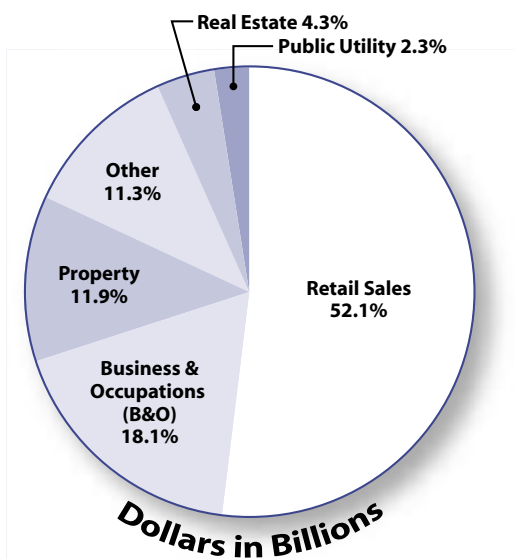
This year, legislators wrote three separate budgets:

The general fund budget, the transportation budget and the capital budget.

General Fund Budget

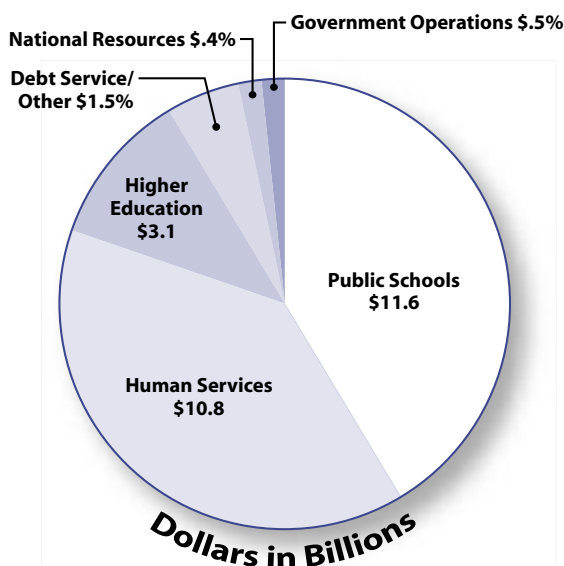
The general fund budget pays for the day-to-day operation of state government and is funded mainly by the state sales tax.

In the 2003-05 general fund budget, these revenues came from:



The general fund budget passed this session by the Legislature for 2005-07 is \$26 billion.

These funds are to be spent on:



Education and higher education

To improve public education, the Legislature's 2005-07 general fund budget:

- fully funds the 2003 education initiatives, which were approved by vast supermajorities but have gone unfunded for the past two years:
 - Initiative 728 for reduced class sizes, and
 - Initiative 732 for teacher COLAs;
- funds the first comprehensive review of the state's early learning, K-12 and higher education system in 25 years;
- boosts the special education safety net;
- expands early learning programs and the Learning Assistance program designed to help struggling students;
- increases levy equalization by 12 percent; and
- increases funding for adult basic education and the job skills program.

To enhance the quality and increase access to higher education, the 2005-07 budget:

- allows a family of four with an income of \$43,000 to qualify for a State Need Grant (compared to the previous amount of \$36,500);
- adds nearly 8,000 new higher education enrollments;
- strengthens our state's Guaranteed Education Tuition (GET) program; and
- expands access to baccalaureate degree programs by allowing WSU-Vancouver to offer 4-year degree programs.

Health and long-term care

To make health care more accessible and affordable, the 2005-07 budget:

- provides health care for all Washington children by 2010;
- maintains current Medicaid eligibility and standards;
- keeps the Basic Health Plan at 100,000 enrollees; and
- holds the line on funding for community clinics.

In the area of long-term care, the budget:

- phases out the previously imposed nursing home per patient per day bed tax; and
- increases funding for higher wages for individual providers and agency workers caring for the elderly and disabled.

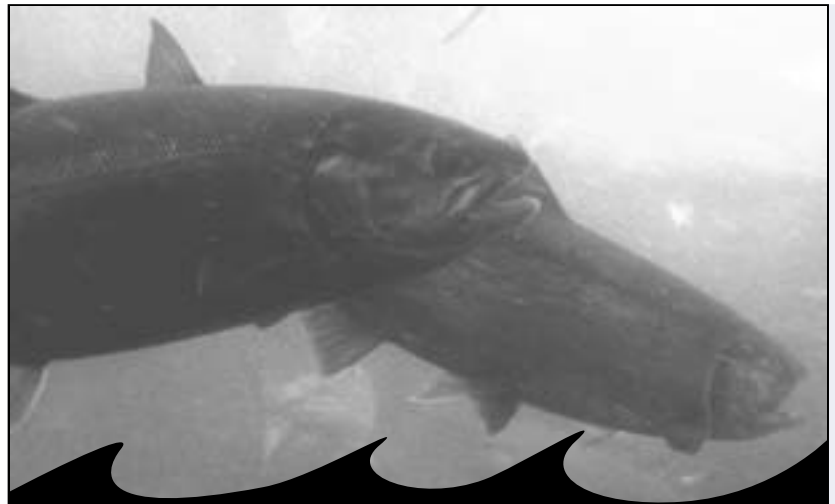
To reduce the cost of prescription drugs, the Legislature:

- allowed uninsured Washingtonians – as well as private businesses and labor unions – to join the state's existing prescription drug program and become eligible for wholesale discounts; and
- approved a waiver to the federal Food and Drug Administration to authorize the state to license prescription drug wholesalers in Canada and elsewhere.

With the state's loss of \$82 million in federal Medicaid funding, 2005 was shaping up to be among the worst years for Washington's mental health system in a long time.

However, the Legislature managed to backfill these lost federal funds for mental health in full, snatching a major victory from the jaws of defeat. But the successes didn't stop there. We also:

- passed landmark legislation to achieve parity for mental health coverage in health insurance plans; and
- expanded and integrated treatment for mental health and chemical dependency.



19th District Projects

The 2005-07 general fund budget also funds local projects and programs that are critical to the 19th District economy:

- new ghost shrimp research at WSU for Willapa Bay;
- operating the Naselle Hatchery;
- continuing to control Spartina weed;
- upgrading emergency radio communications for Cowlitz County 911 in the Mt. St. Helens area;
- providing law enforcement for the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial celebrations;
- extending the Parent Child Assistance Program, for pregnant and parenting women who are chemically dependent or who are at risk of substance abuse; and
- providing additional security at the Stafford Creek Corrections Center.

Transportation Budget

The transportation budget is funded by the state's portion of the gas tax revenue, as well as proceeds from transportation licenses, permits and fees. The gas tax may only be spent on construction and maintenance on our state highways.

We know the 2001 Nisqually earthquake did plenty of damage to our transportation system. But even so, that 6.8 shakeup may have only been a wake-up call. Another earthquake would likely bring down a number of the bridges and overpasses that were weakened in 2001, which would result in significant fatalities to our citizens and bring our state economy to a grinding halt. Experts tell us that it's not a matter of if – it's a matter of when.



That's why this session the Legislature passed an historic, 16-year transportation spending plan to fund more than 300 highway, bridge and intersection repairs in every county of our state. Our region will receive the most funding we've seen in decades – over \$340 million for new projects in southwest Washington alone. Projects funded by the plan in the 19th district, include:

Cowlitz County:

- roadside safety improvements at SR 432;
- improvements on the interchanges on I-5 and SR 432 at Talley Way; and
- a new Abernathy Bridge and realignment at Cameron Creek Road.

Grays Harbor County:

- intersection improvements between US 12 and Clemons Road;
- median cross-over along US 12 between Montesano and Elma;

Pacific County:

- improvements on the Middle Nemah River Bridge on SR 101;
- new bridge on SR 101 at the Bone River;
- improvements along SR 6 at Willapa River and Lilly Wheaton;
- improvements along SR 105 at Smith Creek; and
- bridge improvements along SR 105 at North River.
- a guard rail upgrade on SR 401 near the Megler Rest Area.

Wahkiakum County:

- safety improvements along SR 4 and SR 409, and

We all know that our local roads are critical to our local economies. In addition to investing in public safety, the transportation plan passed by the Legislature also invests in cities' and counties' efforts to make much-needed street and rural road improvements:

- Cowlitz County will receive \$4.7 million in transportation economic development funds, and the towns within the county will receive a total of \$4.5 million;
- Grays Harbor County will receive \$4.7 million, and the towns within the county will receive a total of \$3.4 million;



- Pacific County will receive \$2.8 million, and the towns within the county will receive a total of \$570,000; and
- Wahkiakum County will receive \$1.7 million, and Cathlamet will receive \$45,353.

This entire transportation package is financed through a 9.5 cent increase in the gas tax phased in over the next four years. The gas tax will increase 3 cents this year, 3 cents next year, 2 cents in 2007, and 1.5 cents in 2008. On the whole, the 19th District is what is known as a recipient district. This means that, dollar for dollar, the counties of the 19th District will receive more in projects and services than they pay in the gas tax.

Capital Budget

The capital budget funds maintenance and construction of state buildings, public schools, colleges and universities, public lands and parks, primarily through the sale of bonds.

The 2005-07 capital budget included funding for the following local projects:

- grants for communities suffering from coastal erosion in Grays Harbor County;

- improvements to the World Kite Museum in Long Beach;
- renovations to the Grays Harbor College vocational education building and the GHC Education Center in Ilwaco;
- construction of the Instructional Fine Arts Building at Lower Columbia College;
- restoration of the Julia Butler Hansen Home;
- renovations, utilities upgrades, and multi-use trail projects in Cape Disappointment State Park;
- wastewater treatment plant improvements in Westport;
- wastewater treatment plant improvements in South Bend;
- wastewater treatment plant improvements in Castle Rock;
- new water filter plant in the Chinook Water District; and
- sewer system improvements in Ilwaco.

Whether it be restoring a museum that preserves culture, constructing a college lab building that helps train tomorrow's workforce, or making wastewater treatment improvements to ensure the safety of our fish and our families, the capital budget not only makes critical investments, but also creates hundreds of jobs all around the district.



Elections Reform

The 2004 election exposed serious flaws in our state elections system, and made election reform a top priority in the 2005 legislative session. The Legislature passed a major elections bill that protects the rights of law-abiding voters and restores trust in our election system.

It includes the following reforms:

- all poll-site voters will have to show ID;
- new statewide signature verification standards for absentee ballots will be developed;
- a voter database with a central list of eligible voters will be developed, and will be consistently updated with the names of felons and the deceased;
- the certification period will be lengthened to 21 days time for the return of military ballots;
- ballots will no longer be enhanced when machines cannot read them;
- immediate reconciliation of all votes cast with the number of voters credited at time of certification;
- results of recounts will not be reported until all counties have completed their work; and
- voting twice or destroying voter registrations will be felony offenses.



Other election reforms approved this session includes:

- scrubbing the voter rolls to ensure that felons, the deceased and non-citizens are not voting in our elections;
- requiring electronic voting machines to have a voter-verifiable paper trail; and
- requiring the secretary of state to send information to alert our service men and women that:
 - return postage on military ballots is free;
 - the date written by the voter on the return envelope is considered the date of mailing;
 - the envelope must be signed by election day; military voters do not need to pre-register;
 - faxed ballots are allowed; and
 - e-mailed ballots are available.

Government Accountability

Responding to taxpayers' calls for more efficient and responsive state government, the Legislature approved comprehensive accountability measures, including:

- requiring independent performance reviews of all state agencies;
- guaranteeing citizen input by establishing a Citizen Advisory Board;
- developing an audit schedule in order to identify weak areas and improve efficiency; and
- establishing a performance scorecard to show how agencies are performing in areas such as:
 - quality management,
 - productivity,
 - fiscal efficiency,
 - program effectiveness and
 - customer satisfaction.

Other Highlights

The Legislature also:

- provided state employees with a 3.2 percent cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) on July 1, 2005, and a 1.6 percent COLA on July 1, 2006 – their first pay increase in five years;
- established a child care worker career and wage ladder in licensed child care centers;
- increased unemployment benefits for seasonal workers without raising business taxes;
- passed a measure requiring at least 15 percent of labor hours on large public works projects be performed by apprentices;
- extended the lower-Columbia steelhead recovery group to 2010, and added salmon to the recovery efforts;
- allowed fire protection districts to levy an additional 25 cents per \$1,000 of assessed property value; and
- created a dedicated fund for local government financial assistance, which will result in the allocation of an additional \$400,000 per year for cities and \$500,000 per year for counties in the 19th District.



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